

Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition

# Part VII

Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines

## **PART VII - EASTERN CAMBRIDGE DESIGN GUIDELINES**

*The Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines were developed as part of the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS). The guidelines are intended to inform property owners, business owners, developers, and the general public about the desired form and character of development in the ECaPS Study Area (see attached map, Eastern Cambridge Focus Areas). They will guide development activities in this area, particularly in North Point, the Volpe site, the transition areas between residential neighborhoods and Kendall Square, as well as other areas in Wellington-Harrington, Area IV, and East Cambridge. The aim is to create consistently high-quality public environments, and to ensure that development contributes to the character and vitality of the surrounding community. The guidelines are based on the following core principles:*

- *Manage development to maintain livability in residential neighborhoods and ensure compatibility with existing neighborhood character.*
- *Provide better transitions between developed/developing areas and residential neighborhoods.*
- *Create new mixed-use neighborhoods at North Point and the Volpe Center that are integrated with the existing urban fabric.*
- *Enhance quality of life through the creation of active streets, new public open spaces, and expanded retail opportunities.*
- *Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections throughout Eastern Cambridge, especially between residential neighborhoods and Kendall Square, the Lechmere transit station, and the Charles River.*

*The Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines will be referenced by the Planning Board in their review of special permit applications for projects in the ECaPS Study Area that are before the Board. These guidelines will be specifically referenced in the City's zoning ordinance in the Project Review Special Permit section and in the PUD text where applicable. Therefore, they will serve as a guide to developers for projects in the Eastern Cambridge study area that seek a PUD special permit or a Project Review special permit, among other discretionary permits.*

*The guidelines are organized into two sections: Built Form, which addresses the use, scale, and character of buildings; and Public Realm, which addresses connections, streets and sidewalks, open space, and transportation. Where additional area-specific guidelines are proposed, they are listed at the end of the appropriate section. The areas are the focus areas as defined for ECaPS and are shown in the attached map, Eastern Cambridge Focus Areas.*

## **A. GOALS**

This section lists the goals that guided the development of these guidelines.

### **North Point**

- Create a lively new mixed-use district with strong visual and pedestrian connections to East Cambridge. The new district should be a place to live, work, and enjoy a variety of parks and public spaces.
- Create a new east-west main street through the center of North Point, connecting East Cambridge with the future MDC Park
- Extend First Street into North Point to connect existing and new neighborhoods.
- Create a major new public park easily accessible from the relocated Lechmere T station, First Street, and O'Brien Highway.
- Create a new retail edge at the relocated Lechmere T station and at the intersection of First Street, Cambridge Street, and O'Brien Highway that will complement, not compete with, existing retail on Cambridge Street.

### **Volpe Center**

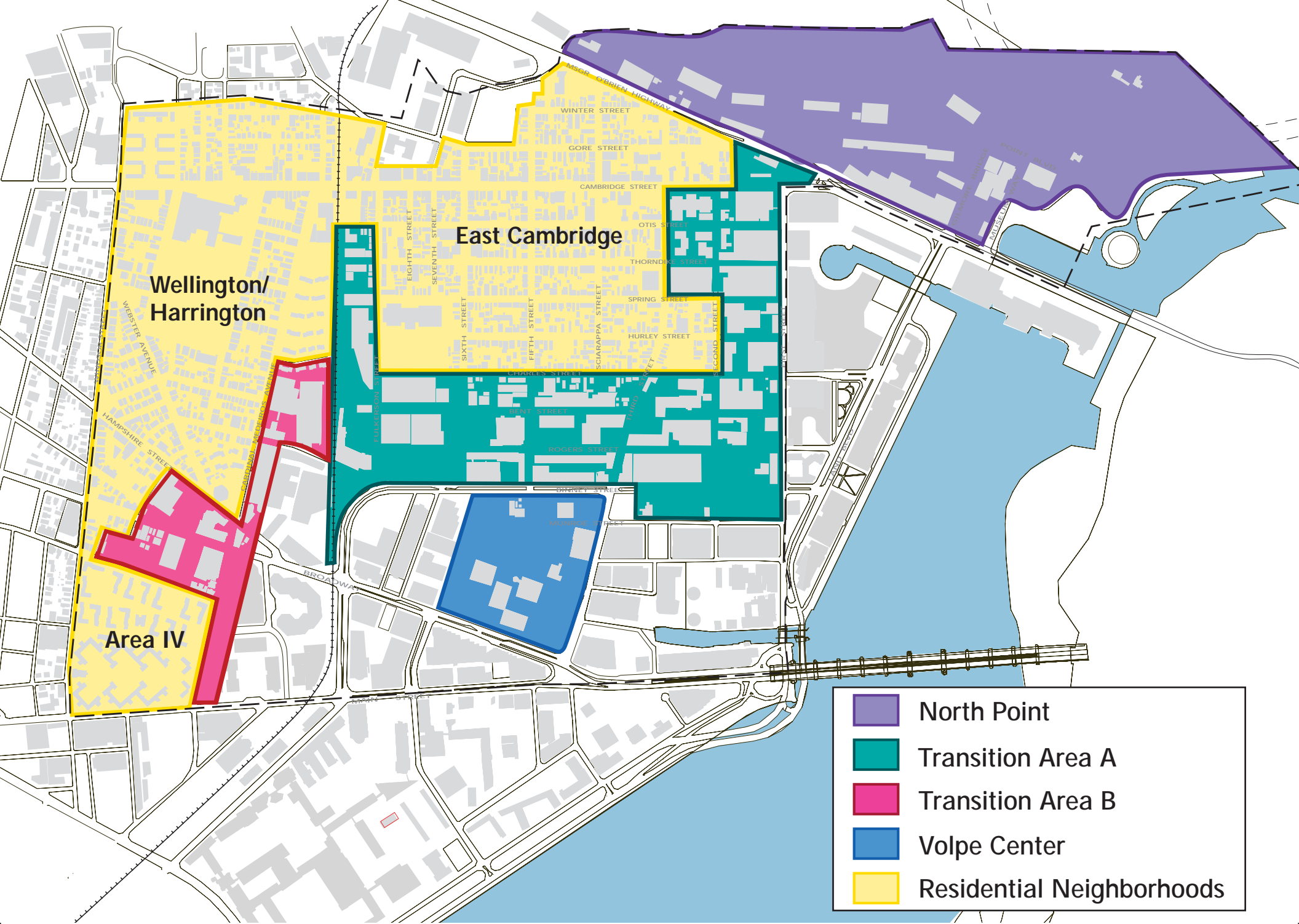
- Create new housing south of Binney Street to link existing neighborhoods and Kendall Square.
- Create a major new public park facing Binney Street, surrounded by residential and retail uses.
- Strongly encourage retail on Third Street and Broadway to create active street life in Kendall Square and to create a lively connection between the neighborhoods and Kendall Square.
- Create a mix of housing and commercial uses along Broadway.
- Create a transition in land uses and heights from Broadway to the residential neighborhoods.

### **Transition Areas**

- Encourage new residential development and conversions of existing buildings to residential use but allow existing commercial uses to remain.
- Use finely graduated heights to create transitions in scale from Kendall Square to residential neighborhoods.
- Create better pedestrian and bicycle connections between residential neighborhoods, Kendall Square, Central Square, and the Charles River.

### **Neighborhoods**

- Preserve and enhance neighborhood character.
- Maintain the walkable scale and character of residential blocks.
- Support and strengthen businesses on Cambridge Street, Broadway, and Main Street.



- North Point
- Transition Area A
- Transition Area B
- Volpe Center
- Residential Neighborhoods

## B. BUILT FORM

### 1. Street-level Uses and Design

The following guidelines apply primarily to large-scale development sites. For these larger sites, developers should clearly identify the intended use and size for each block. For infill development, new buildings should contribute to the character of the existing street.

- a. **Residential blocks** are blocks that are primarily lined with housing. Corner retail is allowed and even encouraged in some of these blocks, depending on the zoning.

New development on residential blocks should be consistent with the following principles:

- i. Create a consistent residential edge, with small setbacks for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- ii. Buildings should be designed with individual units and front doors facing the street, including row house units on the lower levels of multi-family buildings. Where residential lobbies face the street, doors should generally be spaced no more than 75 feet apart.
- iii. Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.

- b. **Mixed-use blocks** are blocks that include housing and/or commercial uses, with a mix of active uses strongly encouraged on the ground floor.

New development on mixed-use blocks should be consistent with the following principles:

- i. Street-level facades should include active uses such as:
  - Residential entrances
  - Shops, restaurants, and cafes
  - Services for the public or for commercial offices such as fitness centers, cafeterias, daycare centers, etc.
  - Community spaces, such as exhibition or meeting space
  - Art exhibition space/display windows
  - Commercial lobbies and front doors

- ii. Office/ R&D uses are discouraged from occupying extensive ground-floor frontage. Where these uses do occur, they should occupy no more than 200 to 250 feet of continuous frontage along public streets.
- iii. Major entrances should be located on public streets, and at or near corners wherever possible. Entrances should relate well to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit stations.
- iv. Transparent materials and interior lighting should be used to maximize visibility of street level uses. Ground floor facades should be at least 30 to 50 percent transparent surface to permit a clear view from the sidewalk to the interior space of the building.
- v. Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.

- c. **Retail blocks** are blocks that include both commercial and residential uses on upper floors, with retail strongly encouraged on the ground floor. Retail blocks are intended to have a high volume of pedestrian traffic, and to support public activity throughout the day and evening.

New development on retail blocks should be consistent with the following principles:

- i. At least 75 percent of the street frontage should be occupied by retail uses, including cafes and restaurants.
- ii. Major entrances should be located on public streets, and on corners wherever possible. Entrances should relate to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit stations.
- iii. Transparent materials and interior lighting should be used to maximize visibility of street level uses. Ground floor facades should be at least 50 to 75 percent transparent surface to permit a clear view from the sidewalk to the interior space of the building.
- iv. Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.

## **2. Building Height and Orientation**

### **a. Major public streets**

These include a new main street at North Point; O'Brien Highway; Cambridge Street; Broadway; Binney Street; Third Street between Broadway and Binney; First Street (including the extension into North Point), and Main Street.

- i. Set back any portion of the building above 65 feet by at least 10 feet from the principal facade.
- ii. For retail and office uses, build to the lot line or provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces. Setbacks used exclusively for ornamental landscaping are not permitted but may be allowed to accommodate street furniture, street trees, or generous sidewalks. Awnings and canopies are encouraged to provide shelter and enliven the ground floor facade.
- iii. For residential uses, provide small setbacks (5 to 10 feet) for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- iv. Driveway turnaround and vehicle drop-off facilities are strongly discouraged along public streets.
- v. Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.
- vi. In use, design, and entry, orient buildings towards corners.

### **b. Neighborhood Streets**

These include existing residential streets in East Cambridge, Wellington/ Harrington, Area IV, and the Transition Area, as well as new residential streets at North Point and the Volpe Center.

- i. Set back any portion of the building above 45 feet by at least 10 feet from the principal facade. Where appropriate, design these setbacks to include balconies and rooftop terraces.
- ii. For residential uses, provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- iii. Provide individual entrances to ground floor units along the street.
- iv. Locate courtyards and open spaces to maximize sun exposure.

### **c. Park Edges**

These are streets facing a public park.

- i. The height of the principal façade of buildings surrounding a park should be no greater than 1/3 the width of the park. For additional height above this limit, buildings should be stepped back by at least ten feet from the principal façade. Greater height without setbacks may, however, be appropriate at corners or in specific locations to create architectural variety. The buildings must conform to overall district height limits in the zoning.
- ii. Locate buildings to minimize shadows on the park, especially in the afternoon.
- iii. Surround public parks with uses that create an active environment throughout the day and evening and increase safety for park users, such as:
  - Buildings should be designed with individual units and front doors facing the street, including row house units on the lower levels of multi-family buildings. Where residential lobbies face the street, doors should generally be spaced no more than 75 feet apart.
  - Shops, cafés and other public uses that enliven the street.

### **d. Other Streets**

- i. If the prevailing height of surrounding buildings is 65 feet or less, establish a cornice line that matches the prevailing height of surrounding buildings. For additional height above the cornice line, provide a setback of at least 10 feet from the principal façade.
- ii. For retail and office uses, build to the lot line or provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces. Setbacks used exclusively for ornamental landscaping are not permitted.
- iii. For residential uses, provide small setbacks (5 to 10 feet) for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- iv. Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.



### **3. Scale and Massing**

- a. For new development sites, the block size should be similar to the existing East Cambridge blocks. An attempt should be made to reduce the distance that pedestrians have to walk to a crosswalk in order to safely cross the street.
- b. Buildings should avoid continuous massing longer than 100 feet facing residential streets and 200 feet facing mixed-use and retail streets. If massing extends beyond this length, it should be made permeable and visibly articulated as several smaller masses using different materials or colors, vertical breaks, bays, or other architectural elements.
- c. In addition to the above limits, buildings should reflect a rhythm and variation appropriate to the urban context. For example, this can be achieved by expressing bay widths of 16 to 25 feet along residential streets and 25 to 50 feet along mixed-use and retail streets.
- d. Buildings should have a clearly expressed base, middle, and top. This may be achieved through changes in material, fenestration, architectural detailing, or other elements.
- e. Use variations in height and architectural elements such as parapets, cornices and other details to create interesting and varied rooflines and to clearly express the tops of buildings.
- f. Emphasize corners using taller elements such as towers, turrets, and bays
- g. Taller buildings should be articulated to avoid a monolithic appearance. Preference is given to point towers over slabs, and to buildings with smaller floor plates.

### **4. Architectural Character**

- a. Residential
  - i. Create varied architecture and avoid flat facades by using bays, balconies, porches, stoops, and other projecting elements.
  - ii. Maximize the number of windows facing public streets to increase safety.
- b. Commercial
  - i. Create varied architecture and avoid flat facades by using recessed or projected entryways, bays, canopies, awnings, and other architectural elements.
  - ii. Vary the architecture of individual buildings to create architecturally diverse districts.

- iii. Where buildings are set back at upper stories, lower roofs may be used as balconies, balustrades, and gardens.

## **5. Environmental Guidelines**

- a. Design buildings to use natural resources and energy resources efficiently in construction, maintenance, and long-term operation of the building. Buildings on a lot should be sited to allow construction on adjacent lots to do the same. Compliance with *Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design* (LEED) certification standards and other evolving environmental efficiency standards is encouraged.
- b. Rooftop mechanical equipment should be sited and shielded to protect neighboring uses from noise impacts.

## **6. Parking**

- a. While underground parking is preferable everywhere, if above ground parking is to be built it should be designed so as not to be visible from public streets or pathways. Above ground structured parking should be lined with active uses (shops, cafes, etc.) along major public streets, or with housing units along residential streets.
- b. Locate vehicular parking entrances on side streets and alleys and provide safe pedestrian access from public streets.
- c. All parking garages must provide direct pedestrian access to the street.
- d. The primary pedestrian exit/access to all garages serving non-residential uses should be to the street or a public area.
- e. Design and locate lighting fixtures in surface parking lots and garages to enhance safety while minimizing light spillover onto adjacent properties.

# **C. PUBLIC REALM**

## **1. Open Space**

- a. Public open space
  - i. The provision of open space of diverse sizes and use is encouraged to enhance the public environment in the study area.

- ii. The provision of interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections to neighborhoods and to encourage pedestrian movement.
- iii. Where major new parks are required by zoning, provide programmed, multi-use open space for both recreational and cultural activities.

Area-specific guidelines:

*North Point*

- The major new park required by the zoning code should be located convenient to the Lechmere T station in order to link East Cambridge and future neighborhoods at North Point.
- In addition to the required public open space, the creation of a series of smaller open spaces such as courtyards, parks, playgrounds and gardens located along the central main street is encouraged.

*Volpe Center*

- Use open space to create links between Kendall Square and the residential neighborhoods.

*Transition Areas and Neighborhoods*

- Locate new open spaces to create linkages and connect to existing parks and open spaces, where possible.

c. Semi-private open space

- i. For residential development, create semi-private open spaces (e.g. front and rear yards, porches, stoops, and patios) that create a transition from public sidewalks and courts to private interior spaces.

Design residential courtyards to be visually accessible from streets to enhance safety and activity along the street.

## **2. Streets and Sidewalks**

a. Character

- i. Use streetscape elements such as trees, benches, signage, and lighting to support active pedestrian uses and to reinforce the character and identity of each district.
- ii. Design streets to encourage pedestrian and cycle activity, and to control vehicle speed in residential areas.

- b. Where appropriate, establish, preserve and highlight views from public streets and spaces to important civic landmarks such as the Charles River cable-stay bridge and the clock tower in Kendall Square.
- c. In the design of new streets, provide sufficient pavement width to accommodate on-street parking where appropriate in order to provide short-term parking and to serve local retail.
- d. In the design of new streets, pathways, and parks, provide pedestrian-scale lighting to enhance pedestrian safety.
- e. Refer to the Cambridge Pedestrian Plan and the Cambridge Bicycle Plan for additional guidance on creating a safe and pleasant environment for pedestrians and bicyclists and for guidance on sidewalk width and street trees.

### **3. Connections**

- a. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to future regional pathways (Grand Junction railroad, North Point path).
- b. Provide strong pedestrian, bicycle and visual connections to the Charles River and public parks through view corridors, signage, and/or art installations.
- f. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing and new bus stops and to transit stations including Kendall Square, Lechmere, Community College and North Station MBTA stations.

#### Area-specific guidelines:

##### *North Point*

- Provide continuous pedestrian and bicycle access through the area to the MDC New Charles River Basin Park.
- Provide new pedestrian crossings along O'Brien Highway with strong visual connections from existing streets in East Cambridge to new streets at North Point. Ensure that new pedestrian crossings are coordinated with traffic operations on O'Brien Highway.
- Provide an attractive landscaped edge between the future Somerville regional bicycle path and the adjacent rail yards.
- Provide landscaped pedestrian/cycle connections from North Point to the future regional bicycle path

#### *Volpe Center*

- Provide green connections to Broadway and Third Street as extensions of the proposed public park.
- Provide strong pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Broad Canal and the Charles River from the site.

#### *Transition Areas*

- Provide safe pedestrian crossings at Binney Street.
- Design the new park on Fulkerson Street to maximize visual connections between neighborhoods on either side of the Grand Junction rail tracks.

#### *Neighborhoods*

- Improve pedestrian, and bicycle connections to the Charles River, particularly across First Street.
- Improve visual, pedestrian, and bicycle connections between the residential neighborhoods on either side of the Grand Junction rail tracks.

## **4. Transportation**

### **a. Transit**

- i. Preserve rights of way for future Urban Ring project.
- ii. Integrate retail and other public activities with any new transit stations.

### **b. Pedestrian**

- i. Provide pedestrian crossings/phases at all major intersections.

### **c. Bicycle/other non-motorized vehicles**

- i. Provide bicycle lanes on major streets.
- ii. Provide sheltered bicycle racks in all new commercial and multi-family residential buildings and in transit stations.
- iii. Provide bicycle racks along the street in retail areas.